

TOPICS OF AN OLD-TIMER

Review of the Late Mr. Durand's Reminiscences, and My Own Recollection of Hamilton Continued—Its Primitive Municipal System—Some of the Men Who Were Prominent in the Late Thirties and Early Forties—Paola Brown, the Bellringer and Crier—Some Good Irishmen Among Hamilton's Early Residents—Teaming in Hamilton Before the Railroads—Irish Editors, Publishers and Printers Prominent.

Hamilton, in early days was governed by a Board of Police Commissioners. The town was divided into four wards, St. Andrew's, St. Patrick's, St. George's and St. Mary's. I remember some of the members, some of the presidents and some of the clerks. Mr. Charles Durand, in his "Reminiscences," says he was clerk of the Police Board in the years 1834-5, and did many things towards the town's progress. He took the census of the town in 1835, when it had a little over two thousand inhabitants. It must have grown very fast, for it claimed to have double that in 1842. I remember mentioning to John Winer, the wholesale druggist, once, on the way to Buffalo, that I lived in Hamilton when it was only 4,000 inhabitants, when he said he lived in it when it did not have 2,000, and that he knew Buffalo when it did not have more than 4,000 population.

The first public building in Hamilton belonging to the town was a small, brick edifice, situated on the north side of King William street, between John and Hughson streets, where the Police Board used to meet. Mr. Durand says it was near the

wood market. The wood market's location must have been changed afterwards, for the writer remembers when it was on the south side of King street, west of John. After Mr. Durand's days there that building was known as the "Engine House," and the "Engine House" was the town lock-up. The Police Board, which regulated town affairs, used to hold their meetings in it; and the Board having purchased an old hand engine, it was located in the same quarters. The marshal or head constable, when I first knew the town, was named Cheevers, I think an American. Of course the Police Board made rules for the government of the town, one of which was that the snow should be cleared from the sidewalks immediately after falling or ceased falling. I remember the "Lilliputian Argus" having a rhyme on this matter one winter, written to the tune of the "Canadian Boat Song," then so popular, of which the following is a couplet:

"Scrape boys, scrape, the snow falls fast,
Old Cheevers is near and the hour is past."

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I cannot now confidently call to mind who some of the Presidents were, but I remember a Mr. Distin, who kept a tin shop, as one; a Mr. Nehemiah Ford, a boss painter, who was conspicuous in town affairs; a Mr. Beasley, a Mr. Miller, known as "Yankee Miller"; a Mr. Gilbert, a hotelkeeper, and an English Catholic; Andrew McIlroy, an Irishman; Mr. John Law, a provincial official. Peter H. Hamilton was the first police president. There was a wagon-maker named English, whose shop was on the north side of the Court House Square, who was a member of the Police Board. "Sam Patch" Ryck-

man, who always carried a big stick, succeeded Cheevers as Marshal or

town constable, and he had a son, a tall fellow named John, who used to assist him in taking prisoners to the "Engine House." The town clerk that "Old Timer" remembers best was named Jackson, an Englishman and a scholarly man, who lost his job from being too much addicted to the "ardent." He was succeeded by Mr. Beasley, but whether the present Beasley or not I do not know. It is possible that the present one of that name is the third in office. I remember in the early forties a spirited contest between a gentleman of this name and another Hamiltonian for some office, when the election lasted a whole week.

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A Hamilton curiosity in those days was Paola Brown, a large, fat, West India negro, who was the town crier and auction bell-ringer. He used to begin every announcement with an "Oh yes!" like the court cryer. He was short breasted and used to talk or cry in puffs. When Lord Metcalfe held a levee in Burley's Hotel, in 1844, Paola presented himself for an interview amid the laughter of a large crowd of urclins and others, of which the writer was one. The governor was good-natured and wore a smile on his suffering face while the interview lasted. He asked Paola where he was born, how old he was, and how long he had been in Canada and in Hamilton. The crowd in the meantime was in an explosive condition. Paola once announced himself as a candidate for parliament for Halton County, in opposition to John Applegath, a miller and baker. "The way I shall ring the courage out of this contemptible opponent of mine will be a caution to colored folks" was the concluding sentence of his humorous address. Applegath withdrew after that. Caleb Hopkins was the man elected.

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There were a good many good Irishmen in Hamilton in the later thirties and the early forties. The O'Reillys, doctors and lawyers; the Duggans, doctors and lawyers; the

Stinsons, large real estate owners and storekeepers; the Magills, storekeepers, one of whom, Charles, was afterwards Mayor of the city and member of Parliament. Matthew, who sold clothing and was a local Methodist preacher. The Irwins were storekeepers and real estate men. There were the Mullins, consisting of several families; one a hotel-keeper, another a doctor, and a third a printer; and still another who owned the "Ship Inn" on James street, near the bay. There were a number of Branigans. "Terry" Branigan, a North of Ireland Catholic, was one of the characters of the town. He took an interest in things. He was a "boss" baker and drove his own bread-wagon. "Terry" was rather "loud-mouthed" in his broad, Monaghan accent, but he was a good fellow. He did many things for the Church and got up the repeal association that used to meet in John Curran's tavern, in the Court House Square, in 1844. John Quinlan, a carpenter, was the orator of this association and when Mr. Bull of the "Gazette" made an attack upon its loyalty in his paper, Mr. Quinlan came to its defence in a speech in which he remarked "it was not in the pork of Bull's horn to do them an injury." There was another Quinlan in the town, an aged dry goods clerk, who was well esteemed and was something of a society man. Andrew McIlroy was a contractor, and at one time a member of the Police Board. Captain Armstrong was a retired military man and a convert to the Catholic faith, who became police magistrate. There was Captain Faucett, too, a military man in active service, for there were soldiers in Hamilton in those days, black as well as white. There were the Bricks, four of them, respectable mechanics, one of whom Timothy, who had a seat on the police board, and

his brother John was assessor for St. Patrick's Ward. There was a family of Hogans, quite respectable, a young woman of whom married a

Capt. Leonard, who sailed a vessel on the lake. There was a Dr. McCartney, who was prominent among the physicians. The wife of Mr. Tiffany, lawyer and reform leader, was an Irish lady. There were four of the McCoys hotelkeepers and team owners. Before the railroads were built teaming was a great business in Hamilton, and in this connection I remember Peter Connors. The McCanns were a respectable family in which there were several fascinating young ladies. There was Denis

(Continued on page 5.)

TOPICS OF AN OLD-TIMER

(Continued from page 1.)

Moore, associated with Mr. Jackson, the tinsmith, whose "stoves and ranges" are now on exhibition at the Provincial Fair; but himself long dead. There was the Hurd family, one of whom was associated with John Winer in the wholesale drug business. A Mr. Fitzgerald, who was associated with Mr. S. Oliver, in the auction business. The Fitzpatricks were a numerous family of respectable mechanics, the father, Kenny, from the Queen's County — John, Joseph, Kenny and Martin, all dead, I suppose; in fact I know. Kenny was a boss painter, and when Hamilton became a city was one of the first representatives for St. Mary's Ward in the city council. He represented that ward nineteen years in succession, and one night, at the meeting of a new council, he dropped dead in his place. He was a most estimable man. He was a brother-in-law of Mr. Matthew O'Connor of this city, they having married sisters, daughters of the late John Molloy of Osgoode Hall, Toronto. The members of Mr. Fitzpatrick's family are now in Chicago, one of his sons being cashier of one of the Courts, and one of his daughters married to a doctor named Cul-

len. Daniel Kelly was the owner of a large carriage factory and at one time a member of the town board. One of the most warmly contested elections for the Town Board that I remember was that between Mr. Kelly and Timothy Brick for St. Patrick's Ward, the latter winning. It was in the middle forties. I remember when Mr. McKinstry came to Hamilton in the middle forties as manager of the Commercial Bank. He was a representative Irishman and was President of the St. Patrick's Society when organized. John P. Larkin, a dry goods merchant, was, I believe, an Irish American, having come to Hamilton from some place in the United States. I think he had a brother-in-law named Corbett, who was associated with him in the store, which was located at the north-east corner of King and John streets, in Irwin's new brick block. Among the hotel men was Charles Norton, who was clerk in the "Royal Exchange" on King street east, and subsequently proprietor of the City Hotel on James street. He was quite a favorite with the traveling public.

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At one time, in the late forties, all the newspaper men in Hamilton were Irish and included George Perkins Bull, publisher of the "Gazette." He previously had had a printing office in Toronto, but published no newspaper there. His sons that "Old Timer" remembers were Richard, Harcourt and George. Richard went into the insurance business, Harcourt went farming on the mountain, and George became a minister, who was a long time located as rector near Niagara Falls, and at the present time I believe fills a Hamilton parish. Harcourt was many years ago elected to the Legislative Council and became a Canadian lord. The father was a leading Orangeman and

Mason. The family, however, was one of the best in Hamilton. Solomon Brega published the "Journal and Express," at one time the leading Reform newspaper in the west. Brega was a Dublin man. He had two sons that I remember: Washington, who married a daughter of John Winer, and went to Washington City, where for many years he represented the New York "Herald." He had a paper of his own for a short time in Hamilton, which was called the "Journal of Commerce." Another of his sons, Charles, was for a time in the Hamilton post office and subsequently went to Chicago, where he made a fortune on the Board of Trade, and is now recognized as one of that city's millionaires. A daughter married a Mr. Campbell, who was appointed Registrar for the County of Peel. The old gentleman spent his latter days at the Queen's Hotel in Toronto. The Bregas were a remarkably handsome family.—There came into the Hamilton newspaper

field in 1846 the Smiley family, with Robert Smiley at their head, and started the "Hamilton Spectator," which in 1848 became the second daily paper in Upper Canada, the first being the "British Whig" of Kingston, from which paper Robert Smiley had graduated. It was the handsomest paper in Canada—the Spectator. There were four brothers of the Smileys that owned the business in succession. They were Robert, James, John, and Hugh. In a short time they followed each other to the grave, dying quickly of consumption. Robert Smiley built up an extensive business in an incredibly short time. His paper soon became the leading Conservative paper of Upper Canada. In Smiley George Brown found "a foeman worthy of his steel." "Old-Timer" was present when these two champions met personally for the first time and heard their rallying of each other.

John Douglas, an Irishman, notwithstanding his Scotch name, came to Hamilton from Picton. He was sub-editor of the "Spectator" for many months. He subsequently started a paper of his own, some time in 1848. It was a Reform sheet, but did not last long. He went from Hamilton to Brantford. Another Irishman, Professor Kingston, about 1847 or 1848, started a paper called "The Provincialist." It was a Reform journal, but the field was not then ripe for more newspapers, no matter how many Irish journalists entered the newspaper field. The "Christian Advocate," a Methodist organ, edited by a Rev. Dr. Webster, entered the field about this time, but its ultimate fate I am not aware of. Dr. Webster, too, was Irish. In fact every paper in Hamilton for years was owned or edited by an Irishman. There were some conspicuous Irish printers in those days too, in Hamilton, such as William

Nicholson, who was afterwards part proprietor of the "Times"; and John Hand, who was reputed the fastest compositor in America. He, too, was afterwards a partner in the "Times" concern. Nicholson subsequently established the "Barrie Examiner." He died a good many years since, leaving a widow and several sons. The sons, in succession, have themselves become prominent newspaper men. The widow, whom "Old-Timer" remembers well, was before her marriage, one of Hamilton's belles. She died in Toronto last winter at an advanced age. I do not know what became of John Hand, but think he went south. Richard Donnelly, a famous Chicago printer, and one of the foremost anywhere, graduated from the "Times" office in Hamilton. His death occurred in Chicago a few years ago, but the business is carried on by his

son. R. R. Donnelly published the first Hamilton Directory. The Chicago Directory, one of the largest in the world, has been published by his house for many years. There are others; but I must stop here for the present, for the race of Irish editors, printers and publishers in Hamilton appears to have become extinct.

WILLIAM HALLEY.

P.S.—The Hamilton "Herald" of August 31, under the heading of "Early Local History," devotes over a column of its space to copying some of those recollections of mine from "The Register." I have yet to make the acquaintance of the Harris Brothers, the publishers of that excellent journal, but I knew their father well, from the days of old, when I believe he was first connected with the "Journal and Express," and subsequently "The Banner" and "The Times." Hamilton, I am proud to say, possesses three of the best daily papers in America for a city of its size; and of those I think the "Herald" takes the lead. W.H.